

*Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
Center for Substance Abuse Prevention  
Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) Center for Excellence*

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***“I AM ME”  
Person-First Language***

***Julie Gelo, BSHS/M  
Executive Director  
NOFAS Washington***

***Dan Dubovsky, M.S.W.  
FASD Specialist  
SAMHSA FASD Center for  
Excellence***



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# SAMHSA FASD Center for Excellence

- Information Resource Center:
  - Toll-free number: 866-STOPFAS
- Website: [fasdcenter.samhsa.gov](http://fasdcenter.samhsa.gov)
  - Searchable database of publications and research
  - Downloadable fact sheets, articles, posters, office cards
  - “FASD: The Basics” slideshow and notes
  - Online courses:
    - ❖ FASD 101
    - ❖ CAP 1 for Addiction Professionals
- Provision of training and technical assistance



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# Importance of Using Person-First Language in All We Do

- What is person-first language?
  - It is always speaking about a person by putting the person's name or "a person with" or "an individual with" before any mention of difficulties the person may have



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# Difficulties with Using Person-First Language

- It takes longer to say
- It takes longer to write
- It takes up more space
- People trained in a medical model, including physicians and treatment providers, are not trained in using person-first language
- Some people say it is just a matter of semantics



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# Why Use Person-First Language?

- It is not just a matter of semantics
- Research shows that language is very powerful
  - It influences our attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors
- Respect starts with language
- It is the politically correct way of speaking of people with differences
- National organizations have recognized this
  - E.g., ARC; NAMI



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# Why Use Person-First Language?

- Utilizing non-person-first language conveys the notion that the person is their disability, disease, disorder, or issue
- Utilizing person-first language identifies the person as an individual with an illness, disability, or issue
- Utilizing person-first language makes it easier to identify strengths and abilities
  - The person is an individual with strengths and abilities who has an FASD or who is homeless, or who has alcoholism



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# Why Use Person-First Language?

- Even though it takes more time as it is probably more words to say or write:
  - It shifts our focus from the disability and what is wrong with the person to the person themselves
  - It helps us see the person as coping with a disability rather than being thought of only in terms of the disability



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# Examples of How to Use Person-First Language

## Non-Person-First Language

- He's ADHD
- He's a Down's kid
- She's Fetal Alcohol
- Those Fetal Alcohol Kids
- He's autistic
- A disabled program

## Person-First Language

- John has ADHD
- David has Down Syndrome
- Susan is a child with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
- Kristy and Spencer are teens with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
- Mark has autism
- A program for people with disabilities



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# Examples of How to Use Person-First Language

## Non-Person-First Language

- He's wheelchair bound
- She's an FAS mom
- He's schizophrenic
- Mom says...
- He's an alcoholic

## Person-First Language

- Connor uses a wheelchair
- She is Conrad's mother and she has an FASD
- He has schizophrenia
- Ms. Miller says...
- He has alcoholism



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# What Can We Do Regarding Person-First Language

- Eliminate the word handicap from any State correspondence or documentation
- Disability is not the problem, the real problems are environmental and attitudinal barriers
- Not the disabled but individuals with disabilities
- When the disability is listed first the reference and the attitude toward the person are often negative
  - When people hear that a person is their illness, a picture forms in their mind of what the person is going to be like before they even meet the person



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# What Can We Do Regarding Person-First Language

- Model person-first language at every turn
- Utilize person-first language in all presentations, trainings, and writings
- Ask friends and colleagues to use person-first language
  - In a supportive, not challenging manner
- Talk about the strengths and abilities of the person



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# What Can We Do Regarding Person-First Language

- 60 million Americans with disabilities
  - Largest minority in the country
  - Most discriminated against
- Let's start by simply eliminating certain words from our vocabulary
- Use respectful and proper language in everyday discussions
- It will be the beginning to fair and proper acceptance of individuals with differing abilities



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# A Strengths-Based Approach to Improving Outcomes


- Identify strengths and desires in the individual
  - What do they do well?
  - What do they like to do?
  - What are their best qualities?
  - What are your funniest experiences with them?
- Identify strengths in the family
- Identify strengths in the providers
- Identify strengths in the community
  - Include cultural strengths in the community



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# *Questions?*

## *“I AM ME”*

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